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ABSTRACT

A 23-item questionnaire was mailed to teacher education institutions in the United States that offer programs to prepare early childhood teachers. The questionnaire surveyed the institutions' early childhood teacher education programs, their relationship to state teacher certification requirements, and the nature of the programs' field experiences. A total of 497 questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 202 were returned from institutions located in 47 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico. The frequency of responses for each item was tallied and analyzed. Items requiring open-ended responses were considered according to a content analysis procedure suggested by Krippendorff (1980). Results are reported and discussed, and an address is provided for those wishing to obtain copies of the questionnaire. (RH)

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Early Childhood Teacher Education and Certification

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Introduction

The past several years has seen an increased concern for the preparation of early childhood education teachers and for the nature of the programs that prepare them. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1982) has recently developed guidelines for early childhood teacher education programs that have been tentatively adopted by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). In addition, many states are now certifying early childhood education teachers, either through the use of separate certificates, or by endorsement on elementary education certificates. Many of the programs preparing these teachers must undergo assessment by state departments of education in order to be approved for such certification. In spite of this interest and activity, there is little information available on the preparation of early childhood teachers and on programs that provide that preparation.

In their recent review of studies on the preparation and certification of early childhood teachers, Spodek and Saracho (1982) could identify no studies specific to early childhood teacher education programs although studies of teacher education programs more generally conceived were available. In their survey of teacher education programs published the same year, Spodek and Davis (1982) noted that early childhood teacher education programs generally offer bachelor degrees and are closely related to elementary education programs.

Students are typically admitted directly from high schools with academic criteria used as the basis for selection into the program. Respondents to the survey projected that enrollments will increase in the immediate future and that criteria for selection, retention and graduation will remain the same. The present survey is an attempt to get at additional factors related to early childhood teacher education to the impact of developing certification requirements on the programs, and to the nature of field experiences within the programs.

Procedures

A twenty-three item questionnaire was mailed to teacher education institutions in the United States that prepares early childhood teachers. These institutions were listed in a directory prepared by the Educational Resource Information Clearinghouse/Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC/EECE) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Rothenberg, 1979). Since no other directory of early childhood teacher education institutions is available, this list seemed appropriate for the present study.

The questionnaire surveyed the institutions' early childhood teacher education programs, their relationship to state teacher certification requirements, and the nature of the programs' field experiences.[1] Four hundred ninety-seven questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 202 questionnaires were returned (41% rate of return) from institutions located in 47 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico. The frequency of responses

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[1] Copies of the questionnaire are available upon request by writing to Bernard Spodek, Professor of Early Childhood Education, Bureau of Educational Research, University of Illinois, 1310 South Sixth Street, Champaign, IL, 61820.

for each item were tallied and analyzed. Items requiring open ended responses were analyzed using content analysis as suggested by Krippendorff (1980).

Results

Ninety percent of the programs responding are located in states that certify early childhood teachers. When awarded by level of program the certificates received by the graduates specify mainly primary (40%) and nursery (38%) levels; day care (22%) and kindergarten (1%) alone are seldom specified. While most of the respondents (73%) said their state has a separate early childhood certificate, some said their states endorse early childhood on an elementary certificate. These endorsements are at the kindergarten level (48%) as well as the nursery (26%) and primary (15%) levels.

Almost three-fourths (72%) of the respondents reported that the state certification requirements have not changed the criteria used in selecting the programs' students. While only two respondents (1%) said their programs had become less selective in their admissions, over one-fourth (27%) stated they have become more selective as a result of certification standards. Over two-thirds of the respondents (68%) said the state certification requirements have not changed the type of students selected for the teacher education program.

The amount of general education course work required in these programs has tended to stay the same in 73% of the programs, although it has increased in about one-fourth (26%) of the programs as a direct result of certification requirements. Certification requirements have not changed the kind of

general education courses required in the largest proportion of programs (70%) but have led to change in 30%. The increase in courses seemed to be aimed at providing a broader liberal arts base for the early childhood students. Changes included the addition of courses in economics, computers, English and music. Additionally, two programs reported that a minor or an area of concentration in general education is now required.

Certification requirements have led to an increase in professional education course work in half of the programs (51%) as well as changes in the nature of existing professional courses in over half (54%) of the programs. Fourteen institutions reported the addition of required courses in areas such as reading, early childhood, mathematics, mainstreaming, multiculturalism, infancy and parenting. A few programs reported organizational changes, including an emphasis on primary education, a move to competency-based education, and a focus on the period of birth through age eight.

Forty percent of the programs responding have increased the number of hours they require in their practicum experience. Thirty-six percent of the programs require that the practicum experiences be offered earlier, and 31% have changed the type of practica offered. One-fourth of the programs (25%) made other changes in regard to the practicum experiences. These changes include a greater variety of practicum experiences (e.g., preschool, kindergarten, and primary; urban and suburban) and more laboratory experiences offered as part of the pre-student teaching preparation. The overwhelming majority of the programs (90%) required that students have fewer than 50 clock hours of field experience during their freshman year, while about the same proportion (91%) required that students have 100 clock hours during

their sophomore year. A slightly smaller proportion (80-83%) of the programs required that students have fewer than 100 clock hours during their junior and senior year.

The practicum experience placements required in the programs seem fairly evenly split between kindergarten (26%), nursery (25%), and day care (20%) levels. In student teaching, the kindergarten (33%) and primary (31%) levels are most commonly used, with the nursery (19%) and day care (12%) levels used to a lesser degree.

While more than one-fourth (29%) of the programs increased the amount of time required for student teaching, there was no change in more than two-thirds (70%) of the programs. The total number of clock hours required for student teachers ranged up to 800. Most programs required 200-300 clock hours (21%) with the next largest range being 100-200 clock hours (13%). While the total number of credit hours allocated for student teaching in these programs ranged from 0 to 90, most programs awarded 10 or fewer credits (61%). Eleven to twenty credit hours was the next most popular range (38%). The number of students teaching placements has stayed the same in almost two-thirds (64%) of the programs with three-fourths of the programs requiring two placements. Over a fourth of the programs (28%), however, have increased the number of placements as a result of certification requirements. Similarly, the range of placements required for certification has stayed the same in about two-thirds (66%) of the programs, while over a fourth (30%) have increased the range of student teaching placements.

The number of clock hours students spend in a single placement tends to be fewer when there are multiple student teaching placements. Thus, programs requiring three of four placements generally require 240 or fewer

hours in each placement; the modal range is 160 to 240 hours when students have two placements and 240-360 hours when they have one placement.

Almost half (46%) of the programs used university early childhood education faculty to supervise student teaching and practicum experiences; some programs used other related faculty, and a few used only cooperating teachers. Eighty-nine percent of the programs require that cooperating teachers have at least a bachelor's degree. Two to five years of teaching experience is required in about two-thirds of the programs (64%), with some requiring more. One-fourth (25%) of the programs required a specific course in supervision of cooperating teacher. Over a fourth of the programs (29%) indicated that there are other requirements for the cooperating teachers, including meeting state requirements and obtaining a five year certificate.

Cooperating teachers are selected by school district administrators (25%), cooperating school's administrators (23%), supervisors (22%), and college administrators (22%). In a few programs the university students are also involved in the selection process. In almost half (48%) of the programs, outside personnel are involved in decision-making about the early childhood teacher education program, primarily (69%) as members of advisory committees.

Discussion

The final question of the survey asked the respondents to list the three most significant ways their program is different now from what it was five years ago. The responses grouped themselves into five categories: additional courses required, changes in practica, changes in the student body, changes in faculty, changes related to certification. A closer look at the changes indicate that all of the five major categories were either

directly or indirectly related to concomitant changes in certification requirements.

A large minority (42%) of the respondents reported that professional education course requirements had changed as a direct result of certification. Additional courses in special education, content area (i.e., teaching mathematics, science, social studies, and reading), infancy and parenting have become required components of their early childhood teacher education programs. A somewhat larger proportion of respondents (46%) reported that existing courses had been modified to include information on multiculturalism, nutrition, day care, and administration of child care settings. These changes seem to have limited the number of elective courses available to early childhood majors and the degree of flexibility available to early childhood faculty in designing course work.

A major change in early childhood teacher education has been in the areas of practicum and student teaching experiences. There has been an increase in the amount of field experience and in the number of student teaching hours required. Again, the addition of more requirements puts the burden on the faculty and students to do more within the limited scope of a Bachelor's degree program. While many programs reported fewer students were enrolled, others reported increased enrollments. A number also reported higher expectations for students, better monitoring of students performance and improved screening of preservice teacher candidates. While some of the above improvements may be attributed to a concern for accountability, certification standards demanding higher admission and retention standards also seemed to be a causal factor.

Six programs reported that the faculty were better qualified now than five years ago. This may be an indirect result of some state certification regulations that call for faculty to be trained in the area in which they are teaching and to have appropriate teaching experience.

Several questions might be asked of these data, the first is which are the causes of change: certification standards or program requirements. Programs in early childhood education have been conceived of as reflecting a point of view about early childhood education. Thus the ideologies of programs for children and programs that prepare personnel to staff them were consistent (Spodek, 1975). Yet many of the changes that were seen as significant by our respondents have been caused either directly or indirectly by certification requirements.

This might lead to programs of teacher education being more responsive to the organizational needs of public schools as identified by school boards and school administrators. Programs have certainly become more responsive to the organized teaching profession as a whole, since teachers organizations have become more influential in regards affecting certification standards. Professional teaching groups, however, are only peripherally related to the field of early childhood education. Thus the programs we have surveyed may become more like programs preparing teachers for other levels.

While this may be viewed as a positive gain, there is also a loss to be considered. Early childhood education as a field has always been responsive to the needs of young children and their parents. Among the forces that influence certification requirements, advocates of children and parents seldom have an impact. Thus the responsiveness of the field to its major clients may be diminishing as a result of the impact of certification on how early childhood practitioners in the field are prepared.

Another concern relates to the relationship of teacher education to the field for which practitioners are being prepared. As program development results from a need to meet certification requirements, the conceptual nature of the program changes. Program integrity gives way to the need to add a requirement because of outside demands. Thus, elements in the programs offered become less related to one another and less related to a conception of teacher preparation. In addition, the faculty of teacher education institutions feel less in control of their programs as they respond to the demands of an external authority.

Just as all of teacher education is in a state of flux, so early childhood teacher education is in a period of change. Those changes reflected in this survey demonstrate the influence of certification requirements on programs. It is possible that as the NAEYC guidelines (1982) become more available they, too, will lead to program modifications. This suggests a need to monitor the field, to identify and understand new changes and their impact on the stability, and integrity of early childhood teacher education.

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